

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

Volume 29

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

April, 1995

No. 4

ABUSES OF JOHN 3:16

by Dennis Gullede

One of our most essential tasks is to handle God's word aright (2 Timothy 2:15, ASV). However, the sad truth is that there are some who "corrupt the word of God" (2 Corinthians 2:17), handle "the word of God deceitfully" (2 Corinthians 4:2), and "wrest" the scriptures "unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). Experience teaches us that it is possible for people to have a broad range of Bible knowledge and yet have it so confused as to misrepresent (intentionally or unintentionally) its real meaning. We should remember Paul's warning to the churches of Galatia, that there are "some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:7).

The passage which carries the distinction of being the most memorized verse of the New Testament is also one of the most widely perverted passages spanning both testaments. In John 3:16 we find Jesus saying, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This passage has had many thrilling tributes laid at its feet. It is known to all as, "The Golden Text of the Bible." The great Foy E. Wallace, Jr. called John 3:16, "The most wonderful sentence ever written. The sum total of the whole plan of salvation. The little Bible - the 'Gospel in a Nutshell'." Matthew Henry said, "Here is the gospel indeed, good news, the best that ever came from heaven to earth. Here is much, here is all in a little, the word of reconciliation in miniature." Many people have a high regard for this passage and have sung its praises in tongue and pen, but in the wake of lofty human appraisals come some very serious abuses.

The first abuse of John 3:16 that we shall mention here is that some have used it as proof text for the idea that eternal life is a present possession for the Christian and that he cannot lose it. Those who thus believe argue that eternal life is from the moment of belief,

and can never be forfeited or lost. Brother Guy N. Woods wrote, "When debates were common such views were seldom entertained by members of the churches of Christ since in those encounters the truth, regarding eternal life, was clearly taught and emphasized. When such passages as 1 John 5:11, 13; John 3:16, and other verses were cited in an attempt to show that eternal life is a blessing available to, and actually possessed by children of God today, it was pointed out that truth is always consistent with itself..." (*Questions And Answers, Vol. II, p. 170*). Woods went on to say that there are two classes of scriptures touching the matter of eternal life, one asserting that it is a **promise** (Titus 1:2; 1 John 2:25), and the other that it is **possessed** (1 John 5:11, 13). These passages are easily harmonized when it is understood that eternal life is in prospect to be realized at the end of time (Titus 3:7; Matthew 25:46).

Many have tried to find in John 3:16 support for the teaching of salvation by "faith only." For example, the famous Baptist debater Dr. L. S. Ballard in his 1953 discussion with brother Thomas B. Warren on the plan of salvation, alluded to John 3:16 while affirming that, "The believer in Christ receives spiritual life at faith in Christ." That little expression "at faith" suggest that one is saved at the point of belief, and before his faith leads him to any act of obedience at all. In other words, the claim is made that, Jesus offers salvation merely and solely on the basis of mental acceptance (belief, trust).

Some are convinced that there is merit in this argument because the passage fails to mention baptism in connection with salvation. Yet, the reader will observe, that neither does the passage mention repentance (which is "unto salvation," 2 Corinthians 7:10), nor does it mention confession (which is also "unto salvation," Romans 10:10). As Guy N. Woods has written, "If because John 3:16 does not mention water baptism it is to be rejected

as a condition of pardon, by the same token we must reject repentance as well because there is as much said about baptism in it as there is of repentance. If to this the objection is offered that repentance is elsewhere made essential to salvation, as indeed it is (Acts 17:30), so also is baptism in water (Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3, 4; 1 Peter 3:20, 21)." (*Commentary on John, p. 67*).

Another abuse of this precious passage which we are studying is the popular idea that it is about all the Bible some people need. Some insist, "John 3:16 is all the Bible that we need. If all the Bible were lost except John 3:16 we would have all the Scripture that we need in order to be saved." This falls into the same category of believing that all we need to do religiously is keep the Ten Commandments, or that the Sermon on the Mount contains all the instruction necessary to insure divine approval. Such an approach is ridiculous because John 3:16 was never intended to be viewed as a comprehensive package of saving instruction to the exclusion of the rest of God's word, even though this seems to be its most common application.

It is amazing that anyone would suggest that any portion of Scripture is all we need. If this assessment is true, John the apostle didn't know it; he wrote 21 chapters in his gospel account. If this is true, the Holy Spirit didn't know it; He told John what to write. Paul didn't say, "Only John 3:16 is given by inspiration of God...", he said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God...", which includes John 3:16 (2 Timothy 3:16). The truth is we need all of the Divine Revelation from start to finish. We need all 66 books, 1,189 chapters and 31,102 verses from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. The Bible itself is our textbook on salvation - not just John 3:16!

Some people carry their abuse of the Golden Text so far as to seek in it heavenly sanction for any and every religious practice motivated by human sincerity. The truth is, however, that there is not another verse in the entire Bible which

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

USPO Publication No. 211780

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

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refutes more error than John 3:16. It is a refutation of **atheism**, **agnosticism**, and **humanism** (it reveals God), of **Calvinism** (it extends God's provisions to all the world, and not to a selected few), of **Modernism**, (it asserts the virgin birth in Christ as the "only begotten Son"), of **Oneness Pentecostalism** (it reveals that men will perish who do not believe and obey Christ). Therefore, instead of John 3:16 being an umbrella to shelter every way that seemeth right unto a man in the way of religion, it is actually a militant refutation of the many false ideas it is thought to support.

John 3:16 is everybody's favorite text. If properly understood it will never stand as a proof text for the doctrine of men. It says so much in so few words. As we love the text may we live by the truth it reveals.

10822 Mabelvale West Road
Mabelvale, Arkansas 72103

FOR MEN ONLY

"Do you pretend to have as good judgment as I have?" exclaimed an enraged wife to her husband. "Well, no," he replied slowly, "Our choice of partners for life shows that my judgment is not to be compared to yours."

A newly-married man has discovered that the difference between an umbrella and a woman is that you can sometimes shut up the umbrella.

The wages of sin have never been reduced.

"I'M A YOUNG PERSON,
CAN YOU HELP ME?"

by Allen Webster

"I am at a difficult time in my life. You see, I struggle to be independent without being rebellious. I want to do the right thing, but it is not always clear what that is. I long to be a good example to my friends, but I also want to fit in with my peers. I enjoy Christianity, but the world's pull is strong."

AS A YOUNG PERSON I NEED FOR YOU TO...

"ENCOURAGE ME." You may not remember what it was like to be a teenager, but it is a discouraging time. Teenagers are very hard on themselves. When I make a mistake, I tend to make too much out of it. What I need is for the adults whom I respect to speak words of cheer and give me a pat on the back for the things I do well. I need to know that all people make mistakes.

"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa. 40:30-31). Paul wrote, "Fathers provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Col. 3:21).

"TEACH ME." Yes, even though I sometimes act like I know everything, I realize that I am still learning! The greatest need I have is to learn the Bible. The basis truths which you have known for years, I still do not know. I want to know about Jesus and the love He has shown for me. I yearn to be free from sin's guilt. I want to know when I will be old enough to be baptized. I long to know what Christ wants me to do with my life. How does He expect me to act? What is right and what is wrong?

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa. 119:9-11). Solomon wrote the Proverbs, in part, to give "young men knowledge and discretion" (1:4).

"SHOW ME." I appreciate your instructions, but I find it easier to follow your example. Your life is a better teacher than your lips. What I really want are role models. When I see adults adorning

the Gospel of Christ, it is easier to understand what the precepts mean. When I see the importance you place on worshipping God and studying His word, it motivates me to be interested. When you sacrifice to live right, it does not bother me so much when you ask me to sacrifice.

"My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways" (Prov. 23:26). Jesus faced a young man who asked, "What lack I yet?" to which He responded, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Mt. 19:20-21). Jesus taught the lesson on priorities and exemplified how it applied.

"CORRECT ME." You did not expect to see this one did you!? I act as if discipline were the curse of my life, but it is important to me. It shows that you care about me. I need boundaries set. I must know the difference between right and wrong, truth and error, good and bad. I will test you here. I am curious and want to know what lies outside the boundaries you have set for me. If you remain steadfast in your restrictions, then I will understand your conviction and see it as love for me.

The Proverbs say, "Withhold not correction from the child..." (23:13); "Foolishness is bound in the heart of the child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (22:15); "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (13:24).

Thank you for blessing my life and helping me through this difficult time.

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WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE IN
THE DOCTRINE OF THE
IMPOSSIBILITY OF APOSTASY?

by Marvin Rickett

Many religious people believe in the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy. This doctrine is also known as "once saved, always saved"; "The eternal security of the believer"; "the final perseverance of the saints"; "can't fall from grace." Simply put, it means that "a person, once saved, cannot so sin as to finally be lost."

Why would anyone believe in a doctrine that is so contrary to human nature, common sense, and without Scripture warrant? When it is pointed out that there are numbers of people who were

for a while in their earlier lives devout, sincere and knowledgeable Christians; but who later on became involved in immorality, wickedness, crime, infidelity, quit the church and died in this condition; these folks have a comeback. They may say, "Oh, one who is truly saved wouldn't do that. He will want to do the will of God." But the fact is, some do do that. Faced with this, they say, "Well, he may stray for a while, but he will come home before he dies." The fact is, many don't. Then they say, "Well, he wasn't saved in the first place." How do you know? From all appearances, he was. He had the same "conversion experience" as the others who are sure they are saved. Was his all a pretense? We would have to know his heart to make such a judgment, and we don't.

Not only do the Scriptures not support the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy, they constantly warn against it. Why would God warn against something that cannot happen? Note some of the Scriptures's warnings: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." "Some shall depart from the faith." "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God." "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." (I Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 5:4; I Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:12; II Peter 2:20).

We ask again, why would anyone believe in the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy?

(1) They believe it because **they have to believe it**, if they have accepted the doctrine that God predestined certain individuals to be saved and the rest to be lost. If God reveals individually and personally to one that he is one of those elected to be saved, and then that one later falls back into sin and is finally lost, then God would have erred in his predestination. This cannot be. God cannot make mistakes. He would cease to be God. So, if He truly calls one by His "irresistible grace," He would have to see to it that that person is saved regardless of what he later does.

The problem is, there is no truth to the doctrine that God predestines certain individuals to be saved and then gives

them an irresistible call. Bible predestination foreordains salvation to those who are obedient believers and remain faithful until death. Each person has the choice of whether he will be one of the predestined, by his own faith and obedience.

(2) They believe it because **they want to believe it**. One of their creeds says it is a "most wholesome doctrine, full of all comfort." Believing that they cannot be lost gives them a feeling of security. Taken to the extreme, they can commit all kinds of evil deeds and wickedness, and still be saved. (Of course they say a genuinely saved person will not want to do wickedness.) This view weakens the resolve God's people must have against sin. We might ponder just how much security there is in believing something God's Word does not teach. We should want to believe only those things for which we can find evidence in the Bible. If the Bible doesn't teach it, it certainly is not wholesome.

The Bible does teach that the believer has security! The Lord is able to keep those given to Him (John 10:28). Nothing external can separate one from God (Romans 8:28-39). But the security of the believer requires the cooperation of the believer. He must walk in the light (I John 1:7). His security rests in such passages as II Peter 1:10, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

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CAN WE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE?

by Garry Stanton

There are many who insist that we cannot understand the Bible or at least that we cannot understand the Bible alike. There are over 1,000 denominations today because of this kind of thinking, each with a different creed but claiming the same source book for their creed, the Bible. These denominations differ from one another in worship, doctrines taught, authority, organization, and in what is required of man in order to be saved! The common defense of this is, "We believe the same Bible, but we just interpret it differently." In truth, they are not saying that we cannot understand

the Bible alike, but that we cannot understand the Bible at all!

Can we understand the Bible? Let's not look to human creeds and dogmas for the answer, nor to a clergy system set on defending its position as interpreters of the Bible, but let us go to the source book itself, the Bible, and see what it has to say!

The Bible says that we can understand God's word. The things written in the Old Testament were written to be understood (Rom. 15:4-6). Jesus told us that the Bible can be understood, He said that those who hunger and thirst after God's word will be filled (Matt. 5:6). Many passages affirm that the New Testament is understandable (Eph. 3:3-4; 2 Cor. 11:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:15-16). When someone affirms that the Bible is not understandable, they are in effect saying that an omnipotent (all powerful) God was not able to give man a message that all could understand, or, that God intentionally gave man a message that man could not understand. Neither is an acceptable possibility.

We also see that God does not approve of varying interpretations of His will. Sometimes it is argued that man has the right to interpret God's will in any way that seems right to man. But the ways that seem right to man are the ways that can and often do end in death (Prov. 14:12). God expects His people to speak the same thing in religious matters (1 Cor. 1:10-13). The basis for what we say religiously is the Bible, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11), "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). God allows no variations from His will (Gal. 1:8). When man interprets the word of God differently from what God intended he stands condemned by God for adding to or taking away from God's word (Rev. 22:18-19).

Can we understand the Bible? Yes, we can. We do not need human creeds and dogmas, we do not need continual revelation, we do not need edicts of the pope. We have all we need in God's word, God has given us all that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), God's word completely furnishes us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God gave an understandable message to man which man can obey and be saved.

2707 Mt. Holly Rd.
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My Old Bible

Though the cover is worn,
And the pages are torn,
And though places bear traces of tears
Yet more precious than gold,
is this book worn and old,
That can scatter and shatter my fears.

This old book is my guide.
This is a friend by my side
It will lighten and brighten my way;
And each promise I find,
Soothes and gladdens my mind,
As I read it and heed it each day.

To this book I will cling,
Of its worth I will sing,
Though great losses and crosses be mine;
For I cannot despair,
Though surrounded by care,
While possessing this blessing divine.

Editor's Note: While we do not normally use space in our paper to advertise good works, gospel meetings, etc., the elders at Mammoth Spring believe that the gospel meeting below should be a rare exception. Many of the churches of Fulton County help support our "Gospel News" and we are co-workers with them in the event shown below.

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GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

Area Wide
Gospel Meeting
FAMILIES FIRST



Dan Winkler, Speaker
From Nashville, TN

Sunday, April 30
through
Wednesday, May 3
Salem Civic Center
Hwy. 62 West - Salem, AR
7:30 PM Each Evening
Everyone Invited!

Warren Smith, Song Leader
From Pocahontas, AR

SERMON TOPICS

- Sunday Evening: "How Can I Take My Family To Heaven?"
- Monday Evening: "We Are Part Of God's Family"
- Tuesday Evening: "How Can I Bring A Smile To The Face Of God Our Father?"
- Wednesday Evening: "Heaven ... Hell... My Home Forever"

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Publication # 211780